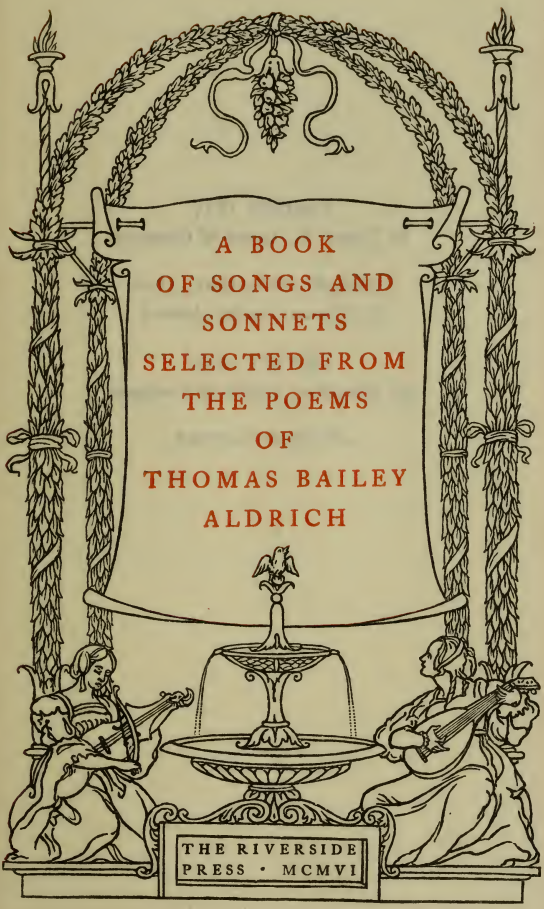


Feb '60
fr Oak Knoll

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A BOOK
OF SONGS AND
SONNETS
SELECTED FROM
THE POEMS
OF
THOMAS BAILEY
ALDRICH
THE RIVERSIDE
PRESS · MCMVI

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TO THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

IDLE THE CHURLISH LEAGUES 'TWIXT YOU AND ME,
SINGER MOST RICH IN CHARM, MOST RICH IN GRACE!
WHAT THOUGH I CANNOT SEE YOU FACE TO FACE?
ALLOW MY BOAST, THAT ONE IN BLOOD ARE WE!
ONE BY THAT SECRET CONSANGUINITY
WHICH BINDS THE CHILDREN OF MELODIOUS RACE,
AND KNOWS NOT THE FORTUITIES OF PLACE,
AND COLD INTERPOSITION OF THE SEA.
YOU ARE MY NOBLE KINSMAN IN THE LYRE;
FORGIVE THE KINSMAN'S FREEDOM THAT I USE,
ADVENTURING THESE IMPERFECT THANKS, WHO LATE,
SINGING A NATION'S WOE, IN WONDER AND IRE, —
AGAINST ME HALF THE WISE AND ALL THE GREAT, —
SANG NOT ALONE, FOR WITH ME WAS YOUR MUSE.

WILLIAM WATSON

TO THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

'ENAMORED ARCHITECT OF AIRY RHYME'

FOREVER YOUNG IS THAT IMMORTAL THRONG
WHOSE GOLDEN RHYMES TO-DAY OUR LIPS RECITE:
LIKE STARS THEY SHINE AND SING ACROSS THE NIGHT;
UNCHANGED AND CHANGELESS THROUGH THE AGES LONG.
IN FANCY'S REALM, UPON FOUNDATIONS STRONG
THEY BUILT THEIR MONUMENTS OF BEAUTY BRIGHT;
CREATING OUT OF DREAMS FOR OUR DELIGHT
ARCHES AND DOMES AND PINNACLES OF SONG.

THEY KNOW NOT AGE; NO, NOR DOST THOU, IN TRUTH,
FOR THOU WITH LAURELS GREEN ON LOCKS OF GOLD
HAST REACHED BUT NOW THE POET'S DEWY PRIME.
A THOUSAND YEARS! O SONG-ENAMORED YOUTH,
THY LYRIC CASTLES NEVER SHALL GROW OLD,
NOR RUIN MAR THEIR AIRY WALLS OF RHYME.

FRANK DEMPSTER SHERMAN

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TO L. A. WITH A BOOK OF VERSES

I

At Shiraz, in a sultan's garden, stood
A tree whereon a curious apple grew,
One side like honey, and one side like rue.

Thus sweet and bitter is the life of man,
The sultan said, for thus together grow
Bitter and sweet, but wherefore none may know.

Herewith together you have flower and thorn,
Both rose and brier, for thus together grow
Bitter and sweet, but wherefore none may know.

II

Take them and keep them,
Silvery thorn and flower,
Plucked just at random
In the rosy weather —
Snowdrops and pansies,
Sprigs of wayside heather,
And five-leafed wild-rose
Dead within an hour.

Take them and keep them:
Who can tell? some day, dear
(Though they be withered,
Flower and thorn and blossom),
Held for an instant
Up against thy bosom,
They might make December
Seem to thee like May, dear!

SARGENT'S PORTRAIT OF EDWIN BOOTH AT 'THE PLAYERS'

That face which no man ever saw
And from his memory banished quite,
With eyes in which are Hamlet's awe
And Cardinal Richelieu's subtle light
Looks from this frame. A master's hand
Has set the master-player here,
In the fair temple* that he planned
Not for himself. To us most dear
This image of him! 'It was thus
He looked; such pallor touched his cheek;
With that same grace he greeted us —
Nay,' t is the man, could it but speak!'
Sad words that shall be said some day —
Far fall the day! O cruel Time,
Whose breath sweeps mortal things away,
Spare long this image of his prime,
That others standing in the place
Where, save as ghosts, we come no more,
May know what sweet majestic face
The gentle Prince of Players wore!

* The club-house in Gramercy Park, New York, was the gift of Mr. Booth to the association founded by him and named 'The Players.'

IDENTITY

SOMEWHERE — in desolate wind-swept space —
In Twilight-land — in No-man's-land —
Two hurrying Shapes met face to face,
And bade each other stand.

'And who are you?' cried one a-gape,
Shuddering in the gloaming light.
'I know not,' said the second Shape,
'I only died last night!'

ON LYNN TERRACE

All day to watch the blue wave curl and break,
  All night to hear it plunging on the shore—
In this sea-dream such draughts of life I take,
    I cannot ask for more.

Behind me lie the idle life and vain,
  The task unfinished, and the weary hours;
That long wave softly bears me back to Spain
    And the Alhambra's towers!

Once more I halt in Andalusian Pass,
  To list the mule-bells jingling on the height;
Below, against the dull esparto grass,
    The almonds glimmer white.

Huge gateways, wrinkled, with rich grays and browns,
  Invite my fancy, and I wander through
The gable-shadowed, zigzag streets of towns
    The world's first sailors knew.

Or, if I will, from out this thin sea-haze
  Low-lying cliffs of lovely Calais rise;
Or yonder, with the pomp of olden days,
    Venice salutes my eyes.

Or some gaunt castle lures me up its stair;
I see, far off, the red-tiled hamlets shine,
And catch, through slits of windows here and there,
Blue glimpses of the Rhine.

Again I pass Norwegian fjord and fell,
And through bleak wastes to where the sunset's fires
Light up the white-walled Russian citadel,
The Kremlin's domes and spires.

And now I linger in green English lanes,
By garden-plots of rose and heliotrope;
And now I face the sudden pelting rains
On some lone Alpine slope.

Now at Tangier, among the packed bazaars,
I saunter, and the merchants at the doors
Smile, and entice me: here are jewels like stars,
And curved knives of the Moors;

Cloths of Damascus, strings of amber dates;
What would Howadji — silver, gold, or stone?
Prone on the sun-scorched plain outside the gates
The camels make their moan.

All this is mine, as I lie dreaming here,
High on the windy terrace, day by day;

And mine the children's laughter, sweet and clear,
Ringing across the bay.

For me the clouds; the ships sail by for me;
For me the petulant sea-gull takes its flight;
And mine the tender moonrise on the sea,
And hollow caves of night.

ANDROMEDA

The smooth-worn coin and threadbare classic phrase
Of Grecian myths that did beguile my youth,
Beguile me not as in the olden days:
I think more grief and beauty dwell with truth.
Andromeda, in fetters by the sea,
Star-pale with anguish till young Perseus came,
Less moves me with her suffering than she,
The slim girl figure fettered to dark shame,
That nightly haunts the park, there, like a shade,
Trailing her wretchedness from street to street.
See where she passes — neither wife nor maid;
How all mere fiction crumbles at her feet!
Here is woe's self, and not the mask of woe:
A legend's shadow shall not move you so!

DESTINY

THREE roses, wan as moonlight and weighed down
Each with its loveliness as with a crown,
Drooped in a florist's window in a town.

The first a lover bought. It lay at rest,
Like flower on flower, that night, on Beauty's breast.

The second rose, as virginal and fair,
Shrunk in the tangles of a harlot's hair.

The third, a widow, with new grief made wild,
Shut in the icy palm of her dead child.

NOCTURNE

Up to her chamber window
A slight wire trellis goes,
And up this Romeo's ladder
Clambers a bold white rose.

I lounge in the ilex shadows,
I see the lady lean,
Unclasping her silken girdle,
The curtain's folds between.

She smiles on her white-rose lover,
She reaches out her hand
And helps him in at the window —
I see it where I stand !

To her scarlet lip she holds him,
And kisses him many a time —
Ah, me ! it was he that won her
Because he dared to climb !

OUTWARD BOUND

I LEAVE behind me the elm-shadowed square
And carven portals of the silent street,
And wander on with listless, vagrant feet
Through seaward-leading alleys, till the air
Smells of the sea, and straightway then the care
Slips from my heart, and life once more is sweet.
At the lane's ending lie the white-winged fleet.
O restless Fancy, whither wouldst thou fare?
Here are brave pinions that shall take thee far—
Gaunt hulks of Norway; ships of red Ceylon;
Slim-masted lovers of the blue Azores!
'T is but an instant hence to Zanzibar,
Or to the regions of the Midnight Sun;
Ionian isles are thine, and all the fairy shores!

'I'LL NOT CONFER WITH SORROW'

I'LL not confer with Sorrow
Till to-morrow;
But Joy shall have her way
This very day.

Ho, eglantine and cresses
For her tresses!—
Let Care, the beggar, wait
Outside the gate.

Tears if you will—but after
Mirth and laughter;
Then, folded hands on breast
And endless rest.

At Haroun's court it chanced, upon a time,
An Arab poet made this pleasant rhyme:

'The new moon is a horseshoe, wrought of God,
Wherewith the Sultan's stallion shall be shod.'

On hearing this, the Sultan smiled, and gave
The man a gold-piece. *Sing again, O slave!*

Above his lute the happy singer bent,
And turned another gracious compliment.

And, as before, the smiling Sultan gave
The man a sekkah. *Sing again, O slave!*

Again the verse came, fluent as a rill
That wanders, silver-footed, down a hill.

The Sultan, listening, nodded as before,
Still gave the gold, and still demanded more.

The nimble fancy that had climbed so high
Grew weary with its climbing by and by:

Strange discords rose; the sense went quite amiss;
The singer's rhymes refused to meet and kiss:

Invention flagged, the lute had got unstrung,
And twice he sang the song already sung.

The Sultan, furious, called a mute, and said,
O Musta, straightway whip me off his head!

Poets! not in Arabia alone
You get beheaded when your skill is gone.

APPARITIONS

At noon of night, and at the night's pale end,
Such things have chanced to me
As one, by day, would scarcely tell a friend
For fear of mockery.

Shadows, you say, mirages of the brain!
I know not, faith, not I.
Is it more strange the dead should walk again
Than that the quick should die?

IMP OF DREAMS

I

Imp of Dreams, when she 's asleep,
To her snowy chamber creep,
And straight whisper in her ear
What, awake, she will not hear—
Imp of Dreams, when she 's asleep.

II

Tell her, so she may repent,
That no rose withholds its scent,
That no bird that has a song
Hoards the music summer-long—
Tell her, so she may repent.

III

Tell her there 's naught else to do,
If to-morrow's skies be blue,
But to come, with civil speech,
And walk with me to Hampton Beach —
Tell her there 's naught else to do!
Tell her, so she may repent —
Imp of Dreams, when she 's asleep!

LOST ART

I

When I was young and light of heart
I made sad songs with easy art:
Now I am sad, and no more young,
My sorrow cannot find a tongue.

II

Pray, Muses, since I may not sing
Of Death or any grievous thing,
Teach me some joyous strain, that I
May mock my youth's hypocrisy!

REMINISCENCE

Though I am native to this frozen zone
That half the twelvemonth torpid lies, or dead;
Though the cold azure arching overhead
And the Atlantic's never-ending moan
Are mine by heritage, I must have known
Life otherwhere in epochs long since fled;
For in my veins some Orient blood is red,
And through my thought are lotus blossoms blown.
I do remember . . . it was just at dusk,
Near a walled garden at the river's turn
(A thousand summers seem but yesterday!),
A Nubian girl, more sweet than Khoorja musk,
Came to the water-tank to fill her urn,
And, with the urn, she bore my heart away!

RESURGAM

All silently, and soft as sleep
The snow fell, flake on flake.

Slumber, spent Earth! and dream of flowers
Till springtime bid you wake.

Again the deadened bough shall bend
With blooms of sweetest breath.

O miracle of miracles,
This Life that follows Death!

THE BELLS AT MIDNIGHT*

In their dark House of Cloud
The three weird sisters toil till time be sped;
One unwinds life, one ever weaves the shroud,
One waits to part the thread.

I

CLOTHO

How long, O sister, how long
Ere the weary task is done?
How long, O sister, how long
Shall the fragile thread be spun?

LACHESIS

'T is mercy that stays her hand,
Else she had cut the thread;
She is a woman too,
Like her who kneels by his bed!

ATROPOS

Patience! the end is come;
He shall no more endure:
See! with a single touch! —
My hand is swift and sure!

* The death of President Garfield was announced at midnight by the tolling of church bells throughout the land.

II

Two Angels pausing in their flight

FIRST ANGEL

Listen! what was it fell
An instant ago on my ear—
A sound like the throb of a bell
From yonder darkling sphere.

SECOND ANGEL

The planet where mortals dwell!
I hear it not . . . yes, I hear;
How it deepens—a sound of dole!

FIRST ANGEL

Listen! It is the knell
Of a passing soul—
The midnight lamentation
Of some stricken nation
For a chieftain's soul!
It is just begun,
The many-throated moan . . .
Now the clangor swells
As if a million bells
Had blent their tones in one!
Accents of despair
Are these to mortal ear;
But all this wild funereal music blown

And sifted through celestial air
Turns to triumphal pæans here!
Wave upon wave the silvery anthems flow;
Wave upon wave the deep vibrations roll
From that dim sphere below.
Come, let us go—
Surely, some chieftain's soul!

RENCONTRE

Toiling across the Mer de Glace,
I thought of, longed for thee;
What miles between us stretched, alas!—
What miles of land and sea!

My foe, undreamed of, at my side
Stood suddenly, like Fate.
For those who love, the world is wide,
But not for those who hate.

FREDERICKSBURG

The increasing moonlight drifts across my bed,
And on the churchyard by the road, I know
It falls as white and noiselessly as snow. . . .
'T was such a night two weary summers fled;
The stars, as now, were waning overhead.
Listen! Again the shrill-lipped bugles blow
Where the swift currents of the river flow
Past Fredericksburg; far off the heavens are red
With sudden conflagration; on yon height,
Linstock in hand, the gunners hold their breath;
A signal rocket pierces the dense night,
Flings its spent stars upon the town beneath:
Hark!—the artillery massing on the right,
Hark!—the black squadrons wheeling down to Death!

ELIZABETHAN LOVE SONG

FROM 'WYNDHAM TOWERS'

It was with doubt and trembling
I whispered in her ear.
Go, take her answer, bird-on-bough,
That all the world may hear—
Sweetheart, sigh no more!

Sing it, sing it, tawny throat,
Upon the wayside tree,
How fair she is, how true she is,
How dear she is to me—
Sweetheart, sigh no more!

Sing it, sing it, tawny throat,
And through the summer long
The winds among the clover-tops,
And brooks, for all their silvery stops,
Shall envy you the song—
Sweetheart, sigh no more.

APPRECIATION

To the sea-shell's spiral round
'T is your heart that brings the sound:
The soft sea-murmurs that you hear
Within, are captured from your ear.

You do poets and their song
A grievous wrong,
If your own soul does not bring
To their high imagining
As much beauty as they sing.

LATAKIA

I

When all the panes are hung with frost,
Wild wizard-work of silver lace,
I draw my sofa on the rug
Before the ancient chimney-place.
Upon the painted tiles are mosques
And minarets, and here and there
A blind muezzin lifts his hands
And calls the faithful unto prayer.
Folded in idle, twilight dreams,
I hear the hemlock chirp and sing
As if within its ruddy core
It held the happy heart of Spring.
Ferdousi never sang like that,
Nor Saadi grave, nor Hafiz gay:
I lounge, and blow white rings of smoke,
And watch them rise and float away.

II

The curling wreaths like turbans seem
Of silent slaves that come and go—
Or Viziers, packed with craft and crime,
Whom I behead from time to time,
With pipe-stem, at a single blow.

And now and then a lingering cloud
Takes gracious form at my desire,
And at my side my lady stands,
Unwinds her veil with snowy hands—
A shadowy shape, a breath of fire!

O Love, if you were only here
Beside me in this mellow light,
Though all the bitter winds should blow,
And all the ways be choked with snow,
'T would be a true Arabian night!

SLEEP

When to soft sleep we give ourselves away,
And in a dream as in a fairy bark
Drift on and on through the enchanted dark
To purple daybreak—little thought we pay
To that sweet bitter world we know by day.
We are clean quit of it, as is a lark
So high in heaven no human eye can mark
The thin swift pinion cleaving through the gray.
Till we awake ill fate can do no ill,
The resting heart shall not take up again
The heavy load that yet must make it bleed;
For this brief space the loud world's voice is still,
No faintest echo of it brings us pain.
How will it be when we shall sleep indeed?

FOREVER AND A DAY

SONG

I

I LITTLE know or care
If the blackbird on the bough
Is filling all the air
With his soft crescendo now;
For she is gone away,
And when she went she took
The springtime in her look,
The peachblow on her cheek,
The laughter from the brook,
The blue from out the May—
And what she calls a week
Is forever and a day!

II

It's little that I mind
How the blossoms, pink or white,
At every touch of wind
Fall a-trembling with delight;
For in the leafy lane,
Beneath the garden-boughs,
And through the silent house
One thing alone I seek.

Until she come again
The May is not the May,
And what she calls a week
Is forever and a day!

ELLEN TERRY
IN 'THE MERCHANT OF VENICE'
1880

As there she lives and moves upon the scene,
So lived and moved this radiant womanhood
In Shakespeare's vision; in such wise she stood
Smiling upon Bassanio; such her mien
When pity dimmed her eyelids' golden sheen,
Hearing Antonio's story, and the blood
Paled on her cheek, and all her lightsome mood
Was gone. This shape in Shakespeare's thought has been!
Thus dreamt he of her in gray London town;
Such were her eyes; on such gold-colored hair
The grave young judge's velvet cap was set;
So stood she lovely in her crimson gown.
Mine were a happy cast, could I but snare
Her beauty in a sonnet's fragile net.

UNSUNG

As sweet as the breath that goes
From the lips of the blown rose,
As weird as the elfin lights
That glimmer of frosty nights,
As wild as the winds that tear
The curled red leaf in the air,
Is the song I have never sung.

In slumber, a hundred times
I have said the mystic rhymes,
But ere I open my eyes
This ghost of a poem flies;
Of the interfluent strains
Not even a note remains:
I know by my pulses' beat
It was something wild and sweet,
And my heart is deeply stirred
By an unremembered word!

I strive, but I strive in vain,
To recall the lost refrain.
On some miraculous day
Perhaps it will come and stay;

In some unimagined Spring
I may find my voice, and sing
The song I have never sung.

PEPITA

Scarcely sixteen years old
Is Pepita. (You understand,
A breath of this sunny land
Turns green fruit into gold:

A maiden's conscious blood
In the cheek of girlhood glows;
A bud slips into a rose
Before it is quite a bud.)

And I in Seville—sedate,
An American, with an eye
For that strip of indigo sky
Half-glimpsed through a Moorish gate—

I see her, sitting up there,
With tortoise-shell comb and fan;
Red-lipped, but a trifle wan,
Because of her coal-black hair;

And the hair a trifle dull,
Because of the eyes beneath,
And the radiance of her teeth
When her smile is at its full!

Against the balcony rail
She leans, and looks on the street;
Her lashes, long and discreet,
Shading her eyes like a veil.

Held by a silver dart,
The mantilla's delicate lace
Falls each side of her face
And crosswise over her heart.

This is Pepita—this
Her hour for taking her ease:
A lover under the trees
In the *calle* were not amiss!

Well, I must needs pass by,
With a furtive glance, be it said,
At the dusk Murillo head
And the Andalusian eye.

In the Plaza I hear the sounds
Of guitar and castanet;
Although it is early yet,
The dancers are on their rounds.

Softly the sunlight falls
On the slim Giralda tower,

That now peals forth the hour
O'er broken ramparts and walls.

Ah, what glory and gloom
In this Arab-Spanish town!
What masonry, golden-brown,
And hung with tendril and bloom!

Place of forgotten kings! —
With fountains that never play,
And gardens where day by day
The lonely cicada sings.

Traces are everywhere
Of the dusky race that came,
And passed, like a sudden flame,
Leaving their sighs in the air!

Taken with things like these,
Pepita fades out of my mind:
Pleasure enough I find
In Moorish column and frieze.

And yet I have my fears,
If this had been long ago,
I might . . . well, I do not know . . .
She with her sixteen years!

FROST-WORK

These winter nights, against my window-pane
Nature with busy pencil draws designs
Of ferns and blossoms and fine spray of pines,
Oak-leaf and acorn and fantastic vines,
Which she will shape when summer comes again—
Quaint arabesques in argent, flat and cold,
Like curious Chinese etchings. . . . By and by
(I in my leafy garden as of old)
These frosty fantasies shall charm my eye
In azure, damask, emerald, and gold.

THE LETTER

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL, DIED FEBRUARY 27, 1887

I HELD his letter in my hand,
And even while I read
The lightning flashed across the land
The word that he was dead.

How strange it seemed! His living voice
Was speaking from the page
Those courteous phrases, tersely choice,
Light-hearted, witty, sage.

I wondered what it was that died!
The man himself was here,
His modesty, his scholar's pride,
His soul serene and clear.

These neither death nor time shall dim,
Still this sad thing must be —
Henceforth I may not speak to him,
Though he can speak to me!

INVITA MINERVA

Nor of desire alone is music born,
Not till the Muse wills is our passion crowned;
Unsought she comes; if sought, but seldom found,
Repaying thus our longing with her scorn.
Hence is it poets often are forlorn,
In super-subtle chains of silence bound,
And 'mid the crowds that compass them around
Still dwell in isolation night and morn,
With knitted brow and cheek all passion-pale
Showing the baffled purpose of the mind.
Hence is it I, that find no prayers avail
To move my Lyric Mistress to be kind,
Have stolen away into this leafy dale
Drawn by the flutings of the silvery wind.

TWO SONGS FROM THE PERSIAN

I

O CEASE, sweet music, let us rest!
Too soon the hateful light is born;
Henceforth let day be counted night,
And midnight called the morn.

O cease, sweet music, let us rest!
A tearful, languid spirit lies,
Like the dim scent in violets,
In beauty's gentle eyes.

There is a sadness in sweet sound
That quickens tears. O music, lest
We weep with thy strange sorrow, cease!
Be still, and let us rest.

II

Ah! sad are they who know not love,
But, far from passion's tears and smiles,
Drift down a moonless sea, beyond
The silvery coasts of fairy isles.

And sadder they whose longing lips
Kiss empty air, and never touch

The dear warm mouth of those they love —
Waiting, wasting, suffering much.

But clear as amber, fine as musk,
Is life to those who, pilgrim-wise,
Move hand in hand from dawn to dusk,
Each morning nearer Paradise.

Oh, not for them shall angels pray!
They stand in everlasting light,
They walk in Allah's smile by day,
And slumber in his heart by night.

NAMELESS PAIN

In my nostrils the summer wind
Blows the exquisite scent of the rose :
Oh for the golden, golden wind,
Breaking the buds as it goes !
Breaking the buds and bending the grass,
And spilling the scent of the rose.

O wind of the summer morn,
Tearing the petals in twain,
Wafting the fragrant soul
Of the rose through valley and plain,
I would you could tear my heart to-day
And scatter its nameless pain !

HEREDITY

A SOLDIER of the Cromwell stamp,
With sword and psalm-book by his side,
At home alike in church and camp:
Austere he lived, and smileless died.

But she, a creature soft and fine—
From Spain, some say, some say from France;
Within her veins leapt blood like wine—
She led her Roundhead lord a dance!

In Grantham church they lie asleep;
Just where, the verger may not know.
Strange that two hundred years should keep
The old ancestral fires aglow!

In me these two have met again;
To each my nature owes a part:
To one, the cool and reasoning brain,
To one, the quick, unreasoning heart.

Not in the fabled influence of some star,
Benign or evil, do our fortunes lie ;
We are the arbiters of destiny,
Lords of the life we either make or mar.
We are our own impediment and bar
To noble endings. With distracted eye
We let the golden moment pass us by,
Time's foolish spendthrifts, searching wide and far
For what lies close at hand. To serve our turn
We ask fair wind and favorable tide.
From the dead Danish sculptor let us learn
To make Occasion, not to be denied :
Against the sheer precipitous mountain-side
Thorwaldsen carved his Lion at Lucerne.

THE FLIGHT OF THE GODDESS

A MAN should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends, and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof,
To keep the Goddess constant and glad.

Of old, when I walked on a rugged way,
And gave much work for but little bread,
The Goddess dwelt with me night and day,
Sat at my table, haunted my bed.

The narrow, mean attic, I see it now!—
Its window o'erlooking the city's tiles,
The sunset's fires, and the clouds of snow,
And the river wandering miles and miles.

Just one picture hung in the room,
The saddest story that Art can tell—
Dante and Virgil in lurid gloom
Watching the Lovers float through Hell.

Wretched enough was I sometimes,
Pinched, and harassed with vain desires;
But thicker than clover sprung the rhymes
As I dwelt like a sparrow among the spires.

Midnight filled my slumbers with song;
Music haunted my dreams by day.
Now I listen and wait and long,
But the Delphian airs have died away.

I wonder and wonder how it befell:
Suddenly I had friends in crowds;
I bade the house-tops a long farewell;
'Good-by,' I cried, 'to the stars and clouds!

'But thou, rare soul, thou hast dwelt with me,
Spirit of Poesy! thou divine
Breath of the morning, thou shalt be,
Goddess! for ever and ever mine.'

And the woman I loved was now my bride,
And the house I wanted was my own;
I turned to the Goddess satisfied—
But the Goddess had somehow flown.

Flown, and I fear she will never return;
I am much too sleek and happy for her,
Whose lovers must hunger and waste and burn,
Ere the beautiful heathen heart will stir.

I call—but she does not stoop to my cry;
I wait—but she lingers, and ah! so long!

It was not so in the years gone by,
When she touched my lips with chrism of song.

I swear I will get me a garret again,
And adore, like a Parsee, the sunset's fires,
And lure the Goddess, by vigil and pain,
Up with the sparrows among the spires.

For a man should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends, and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof,
To keep the Goddess constant and glad.

'PILLARED ARCH AND SCULPTURED TOWER'

Pillared arch and sculptured tower
Of Ilium have had their hour;
The dust of many a king is blown
On the winds from zone to zone;
Many a warrior sleeps unknown.
Time and Death hold each in thrall,
Yet is Love the lord of all;
Still does Helen's beauty stir
Because a poet sang of her!

PURSUIT AND POSSESSION

When I behold what pleasure is pursuit,
What life, what glorious eagerness it is;
Then mark how full possession falls from this,
How fairer seems the blossom than the fruit—
I am perplexed, and often stricken mute
Wondering which attained the higher bliss,
The wingèd insect, or the chrysalis
It thrust aside with unreluctant foot.
Spirit of verse, that still elud'st my art,
Thou uncaught rapture, thou swift-fleeting fire,
O let me follow thee with hungry heart
If beauty's full possession kill desire!
Still flit away in moonlight, rain, and dew,
Will-of-the-wisp, that I may still pursue!

THE SAILING OF THE AUTOCRAT

ON BOARD THE S. S. CEPHALONIA
APRIL 26, 1886

I

O Wind and Wave, be kind to him!
So, Wave and Wind, we give thee thanks!
O Fog, that from Newfoundland Banks
Makest the blue bright ocean dim,
Delay him not! And ye who snare
The wayworn shipman with your song,
Go pipe your ditties otherwhere
While this brave vessel ploughs along!
If still to lure him hold your thought,
O phantoms of the watery zone,
Be wary, lest yourselves get caught
With music sweeter than your own!

II

Yet, soft sea spirits, be not mute;
Murmur about the prow, and make
Melodious the west wind's lute.
For him may radiant mornings break
From out the bosom of the deep,
And golden noons above him bend,

And kindly constellations keep
Bright vigils to his journey's end!

III

Take him, green Erin, to thy breast!
Keep him, dark London — for a while!
In him we send thee of our best,
Our wisest word, our blithest smile —
Our epigram, alert and pat,
That kills with joy the folly hit —
Our Yankee Tsar, our Autocrat
Of all the happy realms of wit!
Take him and keep him — but forbear
To keep him more than half a year. . . .
His presence will be sunshine there,
His absence will be shadow here!

OCTOBER 7, 1894

'His absence will be shadow here' —
A deeper shadow than I meant
Has fallen on the waning year
And with my lightsome verses blent.
Another voyage was to be! —
The ship that bears him now from shore,
To plough an unknown, chartless sea,
Shall bring him back to us no more!

BEFORE THE RAIN

We knew it would rain, for all the morn,
A spirit on slender ropes of mist
Was lowering its golden buckets down
Into the vapory amethyst

Of marshes and swamps and dismal fens—
Scooping the dew that lay in the flowers,
Dipping the jewels out of the sea,
To scatter them over the land in showers.

We knew it would rain, for the poplars showed
The white of their leaves, the amber grain
Shrunk in the wind—and the lightning now
Is tangled in tremulous skeins of rain!

AFTER THE RAIN

The rain has ceased, and in my room
The sunshine pours an airy flood;
And on the church's dizzy vane
The ancient Cross is bathed in blood.

From out the dripping ivy-leaves,
Antiquely carven, gray and high,
A dormer, facing westward, looks
Upon the village like an eye.

And now it glimmers in the sun,
A square of gold, a disk, a speck:
And in the belfry sits a Dove
With purple ripples on her neck.

'A CRAFTY Persian set this stone;
A dusk Sultana wore it;
And from her slender finger, sir,
A ruthless Arab tore it.

'A ruby, like a drop of blood—
That deep-in tint that lingers
And seems to melt, perchance was caught
From those poor mangled fingers!

'A spendthrift got it from the knave,
And tossed it, like a blossom,
That night into a dancing-girl's
Accurst and balmy bosom.

'And so it went. One day a Jew
At Cairo chanced to spy it
Amid a one-eyed peddler's pack,
And did not care to buy it—

'Yet bought it all the same. You see,
The Jew he knew a jewel.
He bought it cheap to sell it dear:
The ways of trade are cruel.

'But I — be Allah's all the praise! —
Such avarice, I scoff it!
If I buy cheap, why, I sell cheap,
Content with modest profit.

'This ring — such chasing! look, milord,
What workmanship! By Heaven,
The price I name you makes the thing
As if the thing were given!

'A stone without a flaw! A queen
Might not disdain to wear it.
Three hundred roubles buys the stone;
No kopeck less, I swear it!'

Thus Hassan, holding up the ring
To me, no eager buyer. —
A hundred roubles was not much
To pay so sweet a liar!

Forever am I conscious, moving here,
That should I step a little space aside
I pass the boundary of some glorified
Invisible domain — it lies so near!
Yet nothing know we of that dim frontier
Which each must cross, whatever fate betide,
To reach the heavenly cities where abide
(Thus Sorrow whispers) those that were most dear,
Now all transfigured in celestial light!
Shall we indeed behold them, thine and mine,
Whose going hence made black the noonday sun? —
Strange is it that across the narrow night
They fling us not some token, or make sign
That all beyond is not Oblivion.

They parted, with clasps of hand,
And kisses, and burning tears.
They met, in a foreign land,
After some twenty years:

Met as acquaintances meet,
Smilingly, tranquil-eyed—
Not even the least little beat
Of the heart, upon either side!

They chatted of this and that,
The nothings that make up life;
She in a Gainsborough hat,
And he in black for his wife.

A TOUCH OF NATURE

When first the crocus thrusts its point of gold
Up through the still snow-drifted garden mould,
And folded green things in dim woods unclose
Their crinkled spears, a sudden tremor goes
Into my veins and makes me kith and kin
To every wild-born thing that thrills and blows.
Sitting beside this crumbling sea-coal fire,
Here in the city's ceaseless roar and din,
Far from the brambly paths I used to know,
Far from the rustling brooks that slip and shine
Where the Neponset alders take their glow,
I share the tremulous sense of bud and brier
And inarticulate ardors of the vine.

PISCATAQUA RIVER

Thou singest by the gleaming isles,
By woods, and fields of corn,
Thou singest, and the sunlight smiles
Upon my birthday morn.

But I within a city, I,
So full of vague unrest,
Would almost give my life to lie
An hour upon thy breast!

To let the wherry listless go,
And, wrapt in dreamy joy,
Dip, and surge idly to and fro,
Like the red harbor-buoy;

To sit in happy indolence,
To rest upon the oars,
And catch the heavy earthy scents
That blow from summer shores;

To see the rounded sun go down,
And with its parting fires
Light up the windows of the town
And burn the tapering spires;

And then to hear the muffled tolls
From steeples slim and white,
And watch, among the Isles of Shoals,
The Beacon's orange light.

O River! flowing to the main
Through woods, and fields of corn,
Hear thou my longing and my pain
This sunny birthday morn;

And take this song which sorrow shapes
To music like thine own,
And sing it to the cliffs and capes
And crags where I am known!

Because the sky is blue; because blithe May
Masks in the wren's note and the lilac's hue;
Because — in fine, because the sky is blue
I will read none but piteous tales to-day.
Keep happy laughter till the skies be gray,
And the sad season cypress wears, and rue;
Then, when the wind is moaning in the flue,
And ways are dark, bid Chaucer make us gay.
But now a little sadness! All too sweet
This springtide riot, this most poignant air,
This sensuous world of color and perfume.
So listen, love, while I the woes repeat
Of Hamlet and Ophelia, and that pair
Whose bridal bed was builded in a tomb.

INSOMNIA

Slumber, hasten down this way,
And, ere midnight dies,
Silence lay upon my lips,
Darkness on my eyes.

Send me a fantastic dream;
Fashion me afresh;
Into some celestial thing
Change this mortal flesh.

Well I know one may not choose;
One is helpless still
In the purple realm of Sleep:
Use me as you will.

Let me be a frozen pine
In dead glacier lands;
Let me pant, a leopard stretched
On the Libyan sands.

Silver fin or scarlet wing
Grant me, either one;
Sink me deep in emerald glooms,
Lift me to the sun.

Or of me a gargoyle make,
Face of ape or gnome,
Such as frights the tavern-boor
Reeling drunken home.

Work on me your own caprice,
Give me any shape;
Only, Slumber, from myself
Let myself escape!

Knowledge — who hath it? Nay, not thou,
Pale student, pondering thy futile lore!
After a space it shall be thine, as now
'T is his whose funeral passes at thy door.
Couldst thou but see with those deep-sealèd eyes,
What lore were thine! The Dead alone are wise.

SEEMING DEFEAT

The woodland silence, one time stirred
By the soft pathos of some passing bird,
Is not the same it was before.
The spot where once, unseen, a flower
Has held its fragile chalice to the shower,
Is different for evermore.
Unheard, unseen
A spell has been!

O thou that breathest year by year
Music that falls unheeded on the ear,
Take heart, fate has not baffled thee!
Thou that with tints of earth and skies
Fillest thy canvas for unseeing eyes,
Thou hast not labored futilely.
Unheard, unseen
A spell has been!

'LIKE CRUSOE, WALKING BY THE LONELY STRAND'

Like Crusoe, walking by the lonely strand
And seeing a human footprint on the sand,
Have I this day been startled, finding here,
Set in brown mould and delicately clear,
Spring's footprint — the first crocus of the year!
O sweet invasion! Farewell solitude!
Soon shall wild creatures of the field and wood
Flock from all sides with much ado and stir,
And make of me most willing prisoner!

AN UNTIMELY THOUGHT

I WONDER what day of the week,
I wonder what month of the year—
Will it be midnight, or morning,
And who will bend over my bier? . . .

—What a hideous fancy to come
As I wait at the foot of the stair,
While she gives the last touch to her robe,
Or sets the white rose in her hair.

As the carriage rolls down the dark street
The little wife laughs and makes cheer—
But . . . I wonder what day of the week,
I wonder what month of the year.

TO HAFIZ

Though gifts like thine the fates gave not to me,
One thing, O Hafiz, we both hold in fee—
Nay, it holds us; for when the June wind blows
We both are slaves and lovers to the rose.
In vain the pale Circassian lily shows
Her face at her green lattice, and in vain
The violet beckons, with unveilèd face—
The bosom's white, the lip's light purple stain,
These touch our liking, yet no passion stir.
But when the rose comes, Hafiz—in that place
Where she stands smiling, we kneel down to her!

BROKEN MUSIC

A note
All out of tune in this world's instrument.

AMY LEVY

I KNOW not in what fashion she was made,
Nor what her voice was, when she used to speak,
Nor if the silken lashes threw a shade
On wan or rosy cheek.

I picture her with sorrowful vague eyes
Illumed with such strange gleams of inner light
As linger in the drift of London skies
Ere twilight turns to night.

I know not; I conjecture. 'T was a girl
That with her own most gentle desperate hand
From out God's mystic setting plucked life's pearl —
'T is hard to understand.

So precious life is! Even to the old
The hours are as a miser's coins, and she —
Within her hands lay youth's unminted gold
And all felicity.

The winged impetuous spirit, the white flame
That was her soul once, whither has it flown?
Above her brow gray lichens blot her name
Upon the carven stone.

This is her Book of Verses — wren-like notes,
Shy franknesses, blind gropings, haunting fears;
At times across the chords abruptly floats
A mist of passionate tears.

A fragile lyre too tensely keyed and strung,
A broken music, weirdly incomplete:
Here a proud mind, self-baffled and self-stung,
Lies coiled in dark defeat.

A DEDICATION

Take these rhymes into thy grace,
  Since they are of thy begetting,
Lady, that dost make each place
  Where thou art a jewel's setting.

Some such glamour lend this Book:
  Let it be thy poet's wages
That henceforth thy gracious look
  Lies reflected on its pages.

THE WINTER ROBIN

Sursum corda

Now is that sad time of year
When no flower or leaf is here;
When in misty Southern ways
Oriole and jay have flown,
And of all sweet birds, alone
The robin stays.

So give thanks at Christmas-tide;
Hopes of springtime yet abide!
See, in spite of darksome days,
Wind and rain and bitter chill,
Snow, and sleet-hung branches, still
The robin stays!

A REFRAIN

High in a tower she sings,
I, passing by beneath,
Pause and listen, and catch
These words of passionate breath —
'Asphodel, flower of Life; amaranth, flower of Death!'

Sweet voice, sweet unto tears!
What is this that she saith?
Poignant, mystical — hark!
Again with passionate breath —
'Asphodel, flower of Life; amaranth, flower of Death!'

THE VOICE OF THE SEA

In the hush of the autumn night
I hear the voice of the sea,
In the hush of the autumn night
It seems to say to me —
Mine are the winds above,
Mine are the caves below,
Mine are the dead of yesterday
And the dead of long ago!

And I think of the fleet that sailed
From the lovely Gloucester shore,
I think of the fleet that sailed
And came back nevermore;
My eyes are filled with tears,
And my heart is numb with woe —
It seems as if 't were yesterday,
And it all was long ago!

ALEC YEATON'S SON

GLOUCESTER, AUGUST, 1720

The wind it wailed, the wind it moaned,
And the white caps flecked the sea;
'An' I would to God,' the skipper groaned,
I had not my boy with me!'

Snug in the stern-sheets, little John
Laughed as the scud swept by;
But the skipper's sunburnt cheek grew wan
As he watched the wicked sky.

'Would he were at his mother's side!'
And the skipper's eyes were dim.
'Good Lord in heaven, if ill betide,
What would become of him!

'For me — my muscles are as steel,
For me let hap what may:
I might make shift upon the keel
Until the break o' day.

'But he, he is so weak and small,
So young, scarce learned to stand —
O pitying Father of us all,
I trust him in Thy hand!

'For Thou, who markest from on high
A sparrow's fall—each one!—
Surely, O Lord, thou 'lt have an eye
On Alec Yeaton's son!'

Then, steady, helm! Right straight he sailed
Towards the headland light:
The wind it moaned, the wind it wailed,
And black, black fell the night.

Then burst a storm to make one quail
Though housed from winds and waves—
They who could tell about that gale
Must rise from watery graves!

Sudden it came, as sudden went;
Ere half the night was sped,
The winds were hushed, the waves were spent,
And the stars shone overhead.

Now, as the morning mist grew thin,
The folk on Gloucester shore
Saw a little figure floating in
Secure, on a broken oar!

Up rose the cry, 'A wreck! a wreck!
Pull, mates, and waste no breath!'—

They knew it, though 't was but a speck
Upon the edge of death!

Long did they marvel in the town
At God His strange decree,
That let the stalwart skipper drown
And the little child go free!

NAPOLEON III

FROM 'THE LAST CÆSAR'

What if the boulevards, at the set of sun,
Reddened, but not with sunset's kindly glow?
What if from quai and square the murmured woe
Swept heavenward, pleadingly? The prize was won,
A kingling made and Liberty undone.
No Emperor this, like him a while ago,
But his Name's shadow; that one struck the blow
Himself, and sighted the street-sweeping gun!
This was a man of tortuous heart and brain,
So warped he knew not his own point of view—
The master of a dark, mysterious smile.
And there he plotted, by the storied Seine
And in the fairy gardens of St. Cloud,
The Sphinx that puzzled Europe, for a while.

I see him as men saw him once—a face
Of true Napoleon pallor; round the eyes
The wrinkled care; moustache spread pinion-wise,
Pointing his smile with odd sardonic grace
As wearily he turns him in his place,
And bends before the hoarse Parisian cries—
Then vanishes, with glitter of gold-lace
And trumpets blaring to the patient skies.

Not thus he vanished later! On his path
The Furies waited for the hour and man,
Foreknowing that they waited not in vain.
Then fell the day, O day of dreadful wrath!
Bow down in shame, O crimson-girt Sedan!
Weep, fair Alsace! weep, loveliest Lorraine!

BATUSCHKA*

From yonder gilded minaret
Beside the steel-blue Neva set,
I faintly catch, from time to time,
The sweet, aerial midnight chime —
'God save the Tsar!'

Above the ravelins and the moats
Of the white citadel it floats;
And men in dungeons far beneath
Listen, and pray, and gnash their teeth —
'God save the Tsar!'

The soft reiterations sweep
Across the horror of their sleep,
As if some demon in his glee
Were mocking at their misery —
'God save the Tsar!'

In his Red Palace over there,
Wakeful, he needs must hear the prayer.
How can it drown the broken cries
Wrung from his children's agonies? —
'God save the Tsar!'

* 'Little Father,' or 'Dear Little Father,' a term of endearment applied to the Tsar in Russian folk-song.

Father they called him from of old—
Batuschka! . . . How his heart is cold!
Wait till a million scourgèd men
Rise in their awful might, and then—
God save the Tsar!

A SORROWFUL woman said to me,
'Come in and look on our child.'
I saw an Angel at shut of day,
And it never spoke — but smiled.

I think of it in the city's streets,
I dream of it when I rest —
The violet eyes, the waxen hands,
And the one white rose on the breast!

PRESCIENCE

The new moon hung in the sky,
The sun was low in the west,
And my betrothed and I
In the churchyard paused to rest —
Happy maiden and lover,
Dreaming the old dream over:
The light winds wandered by,
And robins chirped from the nest.

And lo! in the meadow-sweet
Was the grave of a little child,
With a crumbling stone at the feet,
And the ivy running wild —
Tangled ivy and clover
Folding it over and over:
Close to my sweetheart's feet
Was the little mound up-piled.

Stricken with nameless fears,
She shrank and clung to me,
And her eyes were filled with tears
For a sorrow I did not see:

Lightly the winds were blowing,
Softly her tears were flowing—
Tears for the unknown years
And a sorrow that was to be!

MEMORY

My mind lets go a thousand things,
Like dates of wars and deaths of kings,
And yet recalls the very hour—
'T was noon by yonder village tower,
And on the last blue noon in May—
The wind came briskly up this way,
Crisping the brook beside the road;
Then, pausing here, set down its load
Of pine-scents, and shook listlessly
Two petals from that wild-rose tree.

A MOOD

A BLIGHT, a gloom, I know not what, has crept upon
my gladness —
Some vague, remote ancestral touch of sorrow or of
madness;
A fear that is not fear, a pain that has not pain's
insistence;
A sense of longing, or of loss, in some foregone
existence;
A subtle hurt that never pen has writ nor tongue has
spoken —
Such hurt perchance as Nature feels when a blossomed
bough is broken.

AMONTILLADO

IN A RHYTHM OF MR. THACKERAY

Rafters black with smoke,
White with sand the floor is,
Twenty whiskered Dons
Calling to Dolores —
Tawny flower of Spain,
Wild rose of Granada,
Keeper of the wines
In this old posada.

Hither, light-of-foot,
Dolores — Juno — Circe!
Pretty Spanish girl
Without a grain of mercy!
Here I 'm travel-worn,
Sad, and thirsty very,
And she does not fetch
The Amontillado sherry!

Thank you, breath of June!
Now my heart beats free; ah,
Kisses for your hand,
Mariquita mia.

You shall live in song,
  Warm and ripe and cheery,
Mellowing with years
  Like Amontillado sherry.

While the earth spins round
  And the stars lean over,
May this amber sprite
  Never lack a lover.
Blessèd be the man
  Who lured her from the berry,
And blest the girl that brings
  The Amontillado sherry!

Sorrow, get thee hence!
  Care, be gone, blue dragon!
Only shapes of joy
  Are sculptured on the flagon.
Kisses — repartees —
  Lyrics — all that's merry
Rise to touch the lip
  In Amontillado sherry.

Here be wit and mirth,
  And love, the arch enchanter;
Here the golden blood
  Of saints in this decanter.

When pale Charon comes
To row me o'er his ferry,
I'll fee him with a case
Of Amontillado sherry.

What! the flagon's dry?
Hark, old Time's confession—
Both hands crossed at XII,
Owning his transgression!
Pray, old Monk, for all
Generous souls and merry;
May they have their share
Of Amontillado sherry!

ON READING
WILLIAM WATSON'S SONNETS ENTITLED
'THE PURPLE EAST'

1896

Restless the Northern Bear amid his snows
Crouched by the Neva; menacing is France,
That sees the shadow of the Uhlan's lance
On her clipped borders; struggling in the throes
Of wanton war lies Spain, and deathward goes.
And thou, O England, how the time's mischance
Hath fettered thee, that with averted glance
Thou standest, marble to Armenia's woes!
If 't was thy haughty Daughter of the West
That stayed thy hand, a word had driven away
Her sudden ire, and brought her to thy breast!
Thy blood makes quick her pulses, and some day,
Not now, yet some day, at thy soft behest
She by thy side shall hold the world at bay.

THRENODY

H. H. B.

I

Upon your hearse this flower I lay.
Brief be your sleep! You shall be known
When lesser men have had their day;
Fame blossoms where true seed is sown,
Or soon or late, let Time wrong what it may.

II

Unvexed by any dream of fame,
You smiled, and bade the world pass by;
But I — I turned, and saw a name
Shaping itself against the sky —
White star that rose amid the battle's flame!

III

Brief be your sleep, for I would see
Your laurels — ah, how trivial now
To him must earthly laurel be
Who wears the amaranth on his brow!
How vain the voices of mortality!

ON AN INTAGLIO HEAD OF MINERVA

Beneath the warrior's helm, behold
The flowing tresses of the woman!
Minerva, Pallas, what you will—
A winsome creature, Greek or Roman.

Minerva? No! 'tis some sly minx
In cousin's helmet masquerading;
If not—then Wisdom was a dame
For sonnets and for serenading!

I thought the goddess cold, austere,
Not made for love's despairs and blisses:
Did Pallas wear her hair like that?
Was Wisdom's mouth so shaped for kisses?

The Nightingale should be her bird,
And not the Owl, big-eyed and solemn:
How very fresh she looks, and yet
She's older far than Trajan's Column!

The magic hand that carved this face,
And set this vine-work round it running,
Perhaps ere mighty Phidias wrought
Had lost its subtle skill and cunning.

Who was he? Was he glad or sad,
Who knew to carve in such a fashion?
Perchance he graved the dainty head
For some brown girl that scorned his passion.

Perchance, in some still garden-place,
Where neither fount nor tree to-day is,
He flung the jewel at the feet
Of Phryne, or perhaps 't was Laïs.

But he is dust; we may not know
His happy or unhappy story:
Nameless, and dead these centuries,
His work outlives him — there 's his glory!

Both man and jewel lay in earth
Beneath a lava-buried city;
The countless summers came and went
With neither haste, nor hate, nor pity.

Years blotted out the man, but left
The jewel fresh as any blossom,
Till some Visconti dug it up —
To rise and fall on Mabel's bosom!

O nameless brother! see how Time
Your gracious handiwork has guarded:

See how your loving, patient art
Has come, at last, to be rewarded.

Who would not suffer slights of men,
And pangs of hopeless passion also,
To have his carven agate-stone
On such a bosom rise and fall so!

'ENAMORED ARCHITECT OF AIRY RHYME'

ENAMORED architect of airy rhyme,
Build as thou wilt, heed not what each man says:
Good souls, but innocent of dreamers' ways,
Will come, and marvel why thou wastest time;
Others, beholding how thy turrets climb
'Twixt theirs and heaven, will hate thee all thy days;
But most beware of those who come to praise.
O Wondersmith, O worker in sublime
And heaven-sent dreams, let art be all in all;
Build as thou wilt, unspoiled by praise or blame,
Build as thou wilt, and as thy light is given;
Then, if at last the airy structure fall,
Dissolve, and vanish—take thyself no shame.
They fail, and they alone, who have not striven.

TWO MOODS

I

Between the budding and the falling leaf
Stretch happy skies;
With colors and sweet cries
Of mating birds in uplands and in glades
The world is rife.
Then on a sudden all the music dies,
The color fades.
How fugitive and brief
Is mortal life
Between the budding and the falling leaf!

O short-breathed music, dying on the tongue
Ere half the mystic canticle be sung!
O harp of life, so speedily unstrung!
Who, if 't were his to choose, would know again
The bitter sweetness of the lost refrain,
Its rapture, and its pain?

II

Though I be shut in darkness, and become
Insentient dust blown idly here and there,
I count oblivion a scant price to pay
For having once had held against my lip

Life's brimming cup of hydromel and rue—
For having once known woman's holy love
And a child's kiss, and for a little space
Been boon companion to the Day and Night,
Fed on the odors of the summer dawn,
And folded in the beauty of the stars.
Dear Lord, though I be changed to senseless clay,
And serve the potter as he turns his wheel,
I thank Thee for the gracious gift of tears!

DECORATION DAY

FROM 'SPRING IN NEW ENGLAND'

While yet the year is young
Many a garland shall be hung
  In our gardens of the dead;
On obelisk and urn
Shall the lilac's purple burn,
  And the wild-rose leaves be shed.
And afar in the woodland ways,
Through the rustic churchyard gate
Matrons and maidens shall pass,
Striplings and white-haired men,
And, spreading aside the grass,
Linger at name and date,
Remembering old, old days!
And the lettering on each stone
Where the mould's green breath has blown
Tears shall wash clear again.

But far away to the South, in the sultry, stricken land—
On the banks of turbid streams gurgling among their reeds,
By many a drear morass, where the long-necked pelican feeds,
By many a dark bayou, and blinding dune of sand,

By many a cypress swamp where the cayman seeks its prey,
In many a moss-hung wood, the twilight's haunt by day,
And down where the land's parched lip drinks at the salt sea-waves,
And the ghostly sails glide by — there are piteous, nameless graves.

Their names no tongue may tell,
Buried there where they fell,
The bravest of our braves!
Never sweetheart, or friend,
Wan pale mother, or bride,
Over these mounds shall bend,
Tenderly putting aside
The unremembering grass!
Never the votive wreath
For the unknown brows beneath,
Never a tear, alas!

How can our fancies help but go
Out from this realm of mist and rain,
Out from this realm of sleet and snow,
When the first Southern violets blow?
How must our thought bend over them,
Blessing the flowers that cover them —
Piteous, nameless graves!

IMOGEN

LEONATUS POSTHUMUS SPEAKS:

Sorrow, make a verse for me
  That shall breathe all human grieving;
Let it be love's exequy,
  And the knell of all believing!
  Let it such sweet pathos have
  As a violet on a grave,
    Or a dove's moan when his mate
    Leaves the new nest desolate.
  Sorrow, Sorrow, by this token,
Braid a wreath for Beauty's head. . . .
    Valley-lilies, one or two,
    Should be woven with the rue.
  Sorrow, Sorrow, all is spoken—
      She is dead!

A BRIDAL MEASURE

FOR S. F.

GIFTS *they sent her manifold,*
Diamonds and pearls and gold.
One there was among the throng
Had not Midas' touch at need:
He against a sylvan reed
Set his lips and breathed a song.

Bid bright Flora, as she comes,
Snatch a spray of orange blooms
For a maiden's hair.

Let the Hours their aprons fill
With mignonette and daffodil,
And all that 's fair.

For her bosom fetch the rose
That is rarest—
Not that either these or those
Could by any fortune be
Ornaments to such as she;
They 'll but show, when she is dressed,
She is fairer than the fairest
And out-betters what is best!

DISCIPLINE

In the crypt at the foot of the stairs
They lay there, a score of the Dead:
They could hear the priest at his prayers,
And the litany overhead.

They knew when the great crowd stirred
As the Host was lifted on high;
And they smiled in the dark when they heard
Some light-footed nun trip by.

Side by side on their shelves
For years and years they lay;
And those who misbehaved themselves
Had their coffin-plates taken away.

Thus is the legend told
In black-letter monkish rhyme,
Explaining those plaques of gold
That vanished from time to time!

Fantastic sleep is busy with my eyes:
I seem in some waste solitude to stand
Once ruled of Cheops; upon either hand
A dark illimitable desert lies,
Sultry and still—a zone of mysteries.
A wide-browed Sphinx, half buried in the sand,
With orbless sockets stares across the land,
The wofulest thing beneath these brooding skies
Save that loose heap of bleachèd bones, that lie
Where haply some poor Bedouin crawled to die.
Lo! while I gaze, beyond the vast sand-sea
The nebulous clouds are downward slowly drawn,
And one bleared star, faint glimmering like a bee,
Is shut in the rosy outstretched hand of Dawn.

PALABRAS CARIÑOSAS

SPANISH AIR

Good-night! I have to say good-night
To such a host of peerless things!
Good-night unto the slender hand
All queenly with its weight of rings;
Good-night to fond, uplifted eyes,
Good-night to chestnut braids of hair,
Good-night unto the perfect mouth,
And all the sweetness nestled there—
The snowy hand detains me, then
I'll have to say Good-night again!

But there will come a time, my love,
When, if I read our stars aright,
I shall not linger by this porch
With my farewells. Till then, good-night!
You wish the time were now? And I.
You do not blush to wish it so?
You would have blushed yourself to death
To own so much a year ago—
What, both these snowy hands! ah, then
I'll have to say Good-night again!

THE GRAVE OF EDWIN BOOTH

In narrow space, with Booth, lie housed in death
Iago, Hamlet, Shylock, Lear, Macbeth.
If still they seem to walk the painted scene,
'T is but the ghosts of those that once have been.

TENNYSON

I

SHAKESPEARE and Milton — what third blazoned name
Shall lips of after-ages link to these?
His who, beside the wild encircling seas,
Was England's voice, her voice with one acclaim,
For threescore years; whose word of praise was fame,
Whose scorn gave pause to man's iniquities.

II

What strain was his in that Crimean war?
A bugle-call in battle; a low breath,
Plaintive and sweet, above the fields of death!
So year by year the music rolled afar,
From Euxine wastes to flowery Kandahar,
Bearing the laurel or the cypress wreath.

III

Others shall have their little space of time,
Their proper niche and bust, then fade away
Into the darkness, poets of a day;
But thou, O builder of enduring rhyme,
Thou shalt not pass! Thy fame in every clime
On earth shall live where Saxon speech has sway.

Waft me this verse across the winter sea,
Through light and dark, through mist and blinding sleet,
O winter winds, and lay it at his feet;
Though the poor gift betray my poverty,
At his feet lay it: it may chance that he
Will find no gift, where reverence is, unmeet.

'WHEN FROM THE TENSE CHORDS OF THAT MIGHTY LYRE'

JANUARY, 1892

I

When from the tense chords of that mighty lyre
The Master's hand, relaxing, falls away,
And those rich strings are silent for all time,
Then shall Love pine, and Passion lack her fire,
And Faith seem voiceless. Man to man shall say,
'Dead is the last of England's lords of rhyme.'

II

Yet—stay! there 's one, a later laurelled brow,
With purple blood of poets in his veins;
Him has the Muse claimed; him might Marlowe own;
Greek Sappho's son!—men's praises seek him now.
Happy the realm where one such voice remains!
His the dropped wreath and the unenvied throne.

III

The wreath the world gives, not the mimic wreath
That chance might make the gift of king or queen.
O finder of undreamed-of harmonies!
Since Shelley's lips were hushed by cruel death,
What lyric voice so sweet as this has been
Blown to us on the winds from over seas?

NO SONGS IN WINTER

The sky is gray as gray may be,
There is no bird upon the bough,
There is no leaf on vine or tree.

In the Neponset marshes now
Willow-stems, rosy in the wind,
Shiver with hidden sense of snow.

So too 't is winter in my mind,
No light-winged fancy comes and stays:
A season churlish and unkind.

Slow creep the hours, slow creep the days,
The black ink crusts upon the pen—
Wait till the bluebirds and the jays
And golden orioles come again!

THE KING'S WINE

FROM JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES

The small green grapes in heavy clusters grew,
Feeding on mystic moonlight and white dew
And amber sunshine, the long summer through;

Till, with faint tremor in her veins, the Vine
Felt the delicious pulses of the wine;
And the grapes ripened in the year's decline.

And day by day the Virgins watched their charge;
And when, at last, beyond the horizon's marge,
The harvest-moon drooped beautiful and large,

The subtle spirit in the grape was caught,
And to the slowly dying monarch brought
In a great cup fantastically wrought.

Of this he drank; then forthwith from his brain
Went the weird malady, and once again
He walked the palace, free of scar or pain—

But strangely changed, for somehow he had lost
Body and voice: the courtiers, as he crossed
The royal chambers, whispered— *The King's ghost!*

'I VEX ME NOT WITH BROODING ON THE YEARS'

I VEX me not with brooding on the years
That were ere I drew breath: why should I then
Distrust the darkness that may fall again
When life is done? Perchance in other spheres—
Dead planets—I once tasted mortal tears,
And walked as now amid a throng of men,
Pondering things that lay beyond my ken,
Questioning death, and solacing my fears.
Ofttimes indeed strange sense have I of this,
Vague memories that hold me with a spell,
Touches of unseen lips upon my brow,
Breathing some incommunicable bliss!
In years foregone, O Soul, was all not well?
Still lovelier life awaits thee. Fear not thou!

A PETITION

To spring belongs the violet, and the blown
Spice of the roses let the summer own.
Grant me this favor, Muse — all else withhold —
That I may not write verse when I am old.

And yet I pray you, Muse, delay the time!
Be not too ready to deny me rhyme;
And when the hour strikes, as it must, dear Muse,
I beg you very gently break the news.

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